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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEGUCIGALPA 000870

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STATE FOR WHA

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SUBJECT: TFH01: PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE SANTOS SEES
RESOLUTION OF CRISIS CRITICAL BEFORE ELECTION

Classified By: Ambassador Hugh Llorens for reasons 1.4 (b/d).

¶1. (C) Summary. Liberal Party presidential candidate Elvin Santos told the Ambassador on September 1 that a solution to the Honduran political crisis must come before the November 29 election. The Ambassador said that supporters of de facto regime head Roberto Micheletti, particularly those on the political right must put pressure on Micheletti to sign the San Jose Accord. Santos responded they could be persuaded to do so as long as they are convinced President Manuel Zelaya will be unable to carry out his plans to reform the Constitution or to once again run for president if he is allowed to return to the country. Santos expressed concern that additional sanctions from the international community could make the Micheletti camp even more inflexible. While Santos expressed confidence in his electoral victory, he admitted that the political crisis has had a negative impact on his campaign. End Summary.

¶2. (C) The Ambassador met on September 1 with Liberal Party presidential candidate Elvin Santos at Santos' request. Ambassador Llorens told Santos that influential Hondurans must deliver the message to Micheletti that he must sign the San Jose Accord now. The Ambassador noted that many in the international community including the U.S. were coming to the conclusion that the Micheletti regime officials were not negotiating in good faith and were attempting to run out the clock on Zelaya. He said that U.S. patience was running thin and that he expected additional sanctions would be adopted by the U.S. and by other members of the democratic community. The Ambassador noted that in the absence of an agreement that restored the democratic order many in the international community would not support the electoral process and this would weaken the legitimacy of any new government. The Ambassador informed Santos that Costa Rican President Arias is open to putting in the Accord guarantees regarding President Zelaya's compliance with the Accord, assuming these proposals were serious. The key was to go back to San Jose and conclude the agreement.

Santos Supports San Jose

¶3. (C) Santos told the Ambassador that he publicly reiterated his support for the San Jose Accord on August

¶30. Santos said he received both positive and negative

reactions to his statement. Santos believes the political right could be persuaded to exert pressure on Micheletti to sign the San Jose Accord as long as they are convinced that Zelaya will not be able to run for president again and that he will be unable to carry out his plans for a "fourth urn" in the November election or for a Constituent Assembly. Santos expressed concern about the impact of additional sanctions by the U.S. and the international community on Micheletti's willingness to negotiate. Santos said Micheletti is not a sophisticated statesman and has not understood the lifeline offered to him by the U.S. through the San Jose Accord. Santos noted that Micheletti and his followers feel threatened by the response of the international community to the events of June 28 and expressed concern that additional punitive measures could render them even more entrenched.

Need Solution Now

14. (C) Santos believes a solution to the political crisis is critical before the November 29 election. Santos said both Micheletti and Zelaya need to be clearly told to change their posture. He repeatedly expressed his concern to the Ambassador that action is needed right away and that time is running out. Santos told Ambassador Llorens that he sees anxiety, rage and hatred among Hondurans and expressed concern that some are getting ready to "do bad things." Santos said he believes the prospects for civil strife and violence are high.

Impact of Crisis on Candidacy

TEGUCIGALP 00000870 002 OF 002

15. (C) Santos said that while he remains confident he will be the next President of Honduras, he is concerned about the crisis' impact on his campaign. Santos noted that it is not fair that the candidates have to pay the price for a crisis they did not generate. Santos admitted to the Ambassador that part of the Liberal party (those who back Zelaya) will not support his candidacy. He added that he has particularly lost support among voters in the capital, Tegucigalpa. He noted that all the leftist presidential candidates together could obtain a significant number of votes, votes that otherwise would have been for him. Santos said he wants his campaign to motivate the Liberal party and to bring about the resurfacing of the Liberal spirit. He said he is seeking support from the country's youth and disaffected voters. Santos said National Party candidate Porfirio "Pepe" Lobo is not advocating a solution to the country's political crisis because he benefits from a divided Liberal Party. He added that Lobo opposes having debates among the presidential candidates.

16. (C) Comment. Santos was the leading candidate with a comfortable two digit margin in polls conducted before June 28. Political observers now put Lobo as the front runner. The current political crisis has fractured the Liberal Party that to which Zelaya, Santos and Micheletti belong. If it remains fractured, votes that would have gone to Santos will go to the three leftist candidates, assuring Lobo's victory. In this regard, Santos is in a position to play a more proactive role in support of the San Jose Accord.

LLORENS